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ABSTRACT

Noting a dearth of research on the ethical use of evidence in forensic competitions, a case analysis details a speech delivered by a contestant who apparently borrowed both ideas and writing from another source. In a prize-winning speech, the contestant used source deception, plagiarism, and "pseudo" sources (attribution to sources without citing articles in which the sources were actually found). Plagiarism was present even to the extent of borrowing jokes from sources without attribution. Analysis of such ethical problems can exemplify what not to do in speech competitions, and can bring the problems to the attention of the organizations that sponsor the events. (SG)

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DUST IN THE WIND:
ETHICS IN INFORMATIVE SPEAKING

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A survey of forensics competitors and judges early this decade found near unanimous consent that when "a contestant in informative speaking uses a magazine article *in toto*, as the complete speech, without crediting or revealing the source," (Thomas & Hart, 1983, p. 80) an ethical violation has occurred. (Thomas & Hart, 1983) What is not so clear, however, is what is wrong with a speech where substantial portions are plagarized, but some of the speech content is indeed the original, and properly cited work, of the student. To explore this issue in depth, the following is a case analysis of an informative speech which substantially stole both ideas and writing from another source.

Friedley (1983) stressed the need for directly focusing attention on the issue of ethical evidence usage in individual events:

> . . . individual events educators must be willing to examine the uses of evidence in the competitive setting to assess the extent of ethical abuses. While debate educators have been wiling to undertake such study over the years, individual events research in this area has been extremely limited. Finally, forensics educators and critics must be willing to hold student competitors accountable for their ethical choices concerning evidence usage. (pp. 116-117)

The dearth of research is, in no small part, probably due to the difficulty of obtaining copies of speeches from competitive activities.

To remedy the difficulty in obtaining manuscripts for scrutiny, Frank (1983) proposed that:

> The final rounds of all major national tournaments should be tape-recorded and tapes or transcripts made available to researchers who might with to examine them for ethical violations. (pp. 106-107)

Fortunately, this call has been answered. We can not know whether or not Frank's call for such action prompted it, but both the N.F.A. and A.F.A. make videotapes of final round speech events at their respective national tournaments, Individual Events Nationals and National Individual Events Tournament. Additionally, in 1986, Boaz and Brey began editing an SCA publication which reprints both the National Champion speeches and judge's critiques from both major national individual events tournaments. Thus, it is only recently that manuscripts of national finalist speeches were readily available for research scrutiny.

This paper was prompted from the observation that both National Champions in Informative Speaking in 1987 had chosen the rather unique topic, dust. Subsequent reading of the published manuscripts revealed that both speeches contained a few facts and jokes that were identical -- and not sourced. While pondering the relative merits of further investigation, I decided that the level of achievement warranted a closer look. Both speeches had won the National Championship in the event. A few similarities was one thing, but the possibility of evidence abuse quite another. I agree with Friedley's (1983) assertion that student should be held accountable for the work presented in intercollegiate forensics competition. I also

believe that a higher the level of attainment bears a greater burden of responsibility. National Champion speeches are held as exemplars of excellence in forensics. If such examples are not as pristine as humanly possible then we, as forensic educators, are misguiding our students (albeit unintentionally).

While I had some reservations about the use of evidence in the 1987 A.F.A. National Championship Informative Speech, I was relieved to discover that the the abuses of evidence were slight. Additionally, if punitive action were taken against that speaker, removal of the points the speaker's team earned would have altered the team sweepstakes placing (and possibly the individual sweepstakes placing; I did not check). On the other hand, the 1987 N.F.A. National Championship Informative Speech contained much more flagrant abuses of evidence. Should the National Forensic Association ever decide to take punitive action, the removal of sweepstakes points would <u>not</u> affect the team's overall position at nationals. This research is not meant to cast aspersions on the the teams these speakers represented; indeed, ultimately a coaching staff has no control over what a speaker says or does at any particular tournament. Consequently, any punishment for individual actions should not harm the team that individual represents.[1]

Substantial portions of the 1987 N.F.A. National Championship Informative Speech were taken from an article in the November,

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[1]One possible remedy for this issue is not to alter points awareded, even if a contestant is later found to have abused ethics guidelines. Thus, a national organization might strike the champion from the record (and either "bump" everyone else up, or list no champion that year), but <u>not</u> alter points. Computing the results for a national tournament are difficult enough, without the "ripple" effect if points are reassigned.

1986 issue of *Discover* magainze. In all, I counted 30 sentences, phrases, or paragraphs in the speech which I would consider objectionable. While the speaker does cite the article once (early in the speech), the speaker also used several sources cited in the article, often lifting literally word for word. Additionally, the speaker cites the article once as the November 1986 issue of *Discover*, and again later as Penny Ward Moser, author of **All the Real Dirt on Dust**, neglecting to inform us that this source is the same one already cited as *Discover* magazine. This falls under what Frank (1983) terms "source-splitting" (p. 103) While I find such a practice questionable, I'm not sure it warrants penalties as severe as those warranted by source/data fabrication and plagarism.

The speech did <u>not</u> contain any instances of source or data fabrication. Using the schema developed by Frank (1983), the speaker most frequently used one of two other tactics: source deception (undisclosed sources or 'pseudo-sourcing') and plagarism. Frank (1983) defines undisclosed sources as those which are "never cited in the speech." (p. 101) I modify his definition slightly. If a speaker cites information without a source, even though that source is cited elsewhere in the speech, I would count it as an undisclosed source. If it happens infrequently in a speech, it should cause coaches and judges no concern. But when a lot of information comes from undisclosed sources, it is time for coaches and judges to question competitors' use of evidence.

The dust speech, using my definition, contains several instances of undisclosed sources. For example, the speaker asserted that "In a single cubic inch of air there may be between eight hundred thousand

and one million six hundred thousand tiny particles." (p. 143) The original article stated, "A house may have between 800,000 and 1,600,000 tiny bits of particulate matter--colloidal particles--wafting through every cubic inch of air." (Moser,p. 112) Later, when talking about dust mites, the speaker said, "Now, they feed off the approximately fifty million skin scales that we shed every day, although, happily, they cannot live of living skin." (p. 144), while the original author maintained that, "They live by eating the 50 million or so skin scales our bodies shed every day--though, happily, these scavengers don't live on our skin." (Moser,p. 110)

In both instances, the speaker uses information from the article without citing the source. The information is not lifted word for word, and is thus not plagarism. If undisclosed sourcing occurred once or twice in a speech, as a researcher I would probably not give it a second glance. Yet in this speech, I uncovered <u>sixteen</u> instances of undisclosed sources. Since both the content and the form of the information closely resemble that of the magazine article, I strongly question the ethics of the speaker.

With regard to source deception, this speaker also used what Frank (1983) called "pseudo" sources. These ethical violations are defined as attributing information to a secondary source cited within a primary, source, <u>without</u> also acknowledging that primary source. (Frank, 1983, p. 102). In four instances, the speaker did just this. First, the speaker stated:

> Don Aslet [sic], the self-described Billy Graham of the Pine-sol [sic] set, professional cleaner and author of Clutter's

> Last Stand and Should I Dust or Vacuum First [sic] tells us that . . . . (p. 143)

This source appears, in very similar wording, in the original article:

> According to the self-described 'Billy Graham of the Pine Sol set,' Don Aslett, professional cleaner and author of **Clutter's Last Stand and Should I Dust or Vacuum First?**:...(p. 112)

The information following the "source" is identical in information-content, but not in form of presentation. Thus, again, it is not plagarism, but "pseudo" sourcing. The speaker uses this tactic again when "citing" "John Fergeson of the Cincinnati based Drecket [sic] Company, makers of Endust" (p. 143; p. 110 in article), "David Bodanis, in his book **The Secret House**," (p. 144; p. 111 in article), and, finally, "Edward Baker, an acarologist with the Department of Agriculture," (p. 148, p. 111 in article).

The Bodanis citation could have been looked up by the speaker. However, the information following the "source citation" again closely parallels the magazine article form as well as duplicating its content. Given the pattern of duplicitous sourcing the rest of the speech, I seriously doubt that this is the case. Also, the information ascribed to Edward Baker (the final "pseudo" source) in the speech is <u>not</u> the information attributed to him in the original article. The information the speaker "quotes" from him is actually information from another portion of the article not attributed to any source by the article's author.

The final abuse of evidence by the speaker concerns plagarism. In several instances, the speaker used sentences or phrases virtually

verbatim, often changing only one or two words. The opening sentence of the speech states, "Forty three million tons settle over the United States each year." (p. 142). The original article stated, "43 million tons of it settle over the U.S. every year." (p. 108) There are no substantial changes in the text: the speaker merely deleted the phrase "of it", expanded U.S. to United States, and changed "every" to "each." Once the speaker simply removed a phrase from the middle of a paragraph and added two words. Compare the text of the original:

> Surprisingly, there's always more dust inside your house than outside. . . . In fact, unless you live in a factory town like Steubenville, Ohio, in terms of respirable particles, the air inside your house is twice as dusty as the air outside. (Moser, p. 112)

with this quotation from the speech (text from original magazine is italicized):

> *Surprisingly* enough, *unless you live in a factory town like Stubenville* [sic], *Ohio, the air inside your house is* approximately *twice as dusty as the air outside.* (p. 143)

Unfortunately, this is not the only instance of plagarism in this speech. The speaker directly lifted substantial portions of the *Discover* article <u>ten</u> times in the speech. From the opening line of the speech until the final area, the speaker relies on this tactic for informing the audience. Some instances of plagarism are short in length (as the opening line), while others are much longer:

> Others developed impacted bronchial tubes, an almost unheard of condition under normal circumstances. Doctors

> would thump and massage patients til [sic] they could expand their lungs enough to cough up pencil-shaped columns of dust. (p. 144)

The original article stated (lifted phrases are italicized):

> *Others developed impacted bronchial tubes, an almost unheard of* phenomenon *under* less extraordinary *circumstances. Doctors* treated this ailment by masaging and thumping patients until *they could expand their lungs enough to cough up pencil-shaped* dust columns from the trachea. (Moser, p. 112)-

Except for the paraphrasing of the middle portion and the final phrase, the writing is identical to that of the source from which it was stolen.

What makes this plagarism even more appalling is that the speaker lifted jokes from the original article to use in the speech. In all, three jokes are appropriated. Compare the following texts, which are in the speech followed by the original source (italics in the original source show what the speaker took):

> Now in a good year, for dust [laughter], forest fires can account for up to seven percent of the world total. (p. 143)

> *In a good year (for dust) forest fires can account for seven per cent of the world total.* (Moser, p. 109).

The preceding joke was also stolen by the 1987 A.F.A. National Champion in Informative Speaking. The N.F.A. Champion did not stop there, however. Two more jokes were appropriated:

> Scientists who study how fast dust falls, undoubtedly very patient people, [laughter]. . . (p. 143)

> *Scientists who* measure *how fast dust falls, undoubtedly very patient people. . .* (Moster, p. 112)

and, finally:

> [dust sticking to grease from cooking forms] a velvety mat, just like the one all of you probably have on the top of your refrigerator right now. (p. 143)

> [dust sticking to grease from cooking] forms *a velvety mat, like the one you probably have on the top of* the *refrigerator right now.* (Moser, p. 114)

I find the theft of humor particularly disturbing. Humorous touches in a speech demonstrate superb speech writing and delivery skills. This excellence can often give competitors a well-deserved advantage over other speeches with less flair for a light touch, especially in very tough competiton (as one would expect at a national tournament). What makes this theft of humor even more puzzling is that the speaker demonstrated humorous ability at other points in the speech. For instance, when talking about the average number of dust mites living on a typical mattress, the speaker made a reference to "strangers in the night." This original humorous touch shows that the speakers was capable of generating such cleverness without needing to steal it from source material. Yet, the urge to take it may have been too great. If so, then the speaker is just exhibiting laziness and a lack of originality.

If awards were given for most creative evidence abuse, this speech might deserve a national championship. Sadly, a very talented speaker chose to take unethical shortcuts. The entire speech was not plagiarized, but the talent that does shine through in part of the

speech is muddled by source deception and plagarism throughout the rest of the speech. Greater care must be taken to prevent students from engaging in such practices. Students who do sneak by or slip through the cracks must be held accountable for their actions and words.

My goal at this point is not to discredit the speaker involved in this situation. Rather, I think that this speech and the problems it represents can serve a useful function. First, it can be used as an example of what not to do when preparing a speech event for competition. Second, and just as important, this particular speech certainly managed to cover a broad range of problems. As such, it may be useful in helping to set up guidelines for handling future evidence abuses when they arise. In conversations with the then-Secretary for the N.F.A., I learned that this was the first time someone had brought such a situation to the attention of that national organization. Handling such a situation is no doubt difficult; perhaps it can be made easier in the future[2].

[2] One problem with such research is the time lag involved. The book containing the National Championship speeches is not published until November; videotapes of the final rounds are often unavailable until late the following fall. In my case, the videotape was not available until the second semester of the school year (January, 1988).

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